DCPL #62 Notes Colma

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF COLMA

BY

TERESA ALTIERI

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A Notes on the history of
Colma

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NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF COLMA

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Notes on History of Colma

R. S. Thornton and Patrick Brooks came to Colma about a day apart in 1852. They were the first American settlers and both came from New England. Mr. Brooks from Maine via Boston, and Mr. Thornton from, I think, Vermont. Mr. Brooks, however, had a proud Irish ancestry while Mr. T. had an equally proud Puritan one. The land they found was bare, uninhabited and wild Spanish cattle roamed over the hills. Part of this land was a portion of the Spanish Grant known as 'The Buri-Buri Rancho'. This could be purchased from The United States Govt. at a very nominal price. Other acres were open to homesteading. Recently 100 acres of the original Brooks ranch was sold to Mr. Doelger for a million and a half dollars.

These two original settlers were followed shortly by other settlers, most of whom were Irish, and farming was the principal occupation. Potatoes were the chief crop, but truck gardening was carried on to some extent.

El Camino Real or the Mission Road, of course, ran beside the town. Otherwise there were no real roads, and the cow trails which served were, in winter, so muddy, sleds had to be used in place of wagons. Oxen were the beasts of burden in many cases for heavy loads over muddy roads. They were also used for farm work. The farmers had horses, also, and some carriages and buggies, with now and then, a Tally-ho, but oxen served better in many instances.

Hay and grain, mostly oats and barley, were raised on the hills for sale as well as home consumption. In later years it was very foggy and damp, with little sun and grain raising was practically abandoned. The land, however, was extremely fertile.

These farms, or ranches were practically self supporting small communities, raising nearly all food necessities. Most of the farms had small butcher shops, and dairies and all farmers' wives raised poultry: chickens, geese, turkeys and ducks. In many instances they had their own forges, leather tools, carpentering tools for constructing and repairing buildings, furnishings and implements. In some instances, saddlers, wagonsmiths and cabinet makers (sig) made regular yearly visits to ranches, where, with the materials and tools there, they built equipment, such as wagons, sleds, harness, furniture, and repaired the year's damage.

A blight, lasting several years, put an end to the potato raising, and caused many of the Irish Families with small holdings to leave the farms. Italians came in and raised cabbages and caulifleurs (sic) very successfully. The climate and soil were particularly well suited to cabbages and Colma became famous for fine cabbage, which was shipped East as far as Chicago. Later, violets became an equally profitable, and much more aesthetic product.

Among early Italian settlers were Monsueto and Sylvio Belli. Originally they farmed, but later went into store-keeping and 'Belli's Store'

was in business over seventy years. The Belli block is still a land mark.

Some of the farmers held on, and started cattle raising and dairying. A few contined to fight the potato blight, and finally overcame it by importing seed from Oregon -- Oregon Garnet Chiles. These were impervious to the blight, but potato raising never resumed its former proportions on the hill farms. On large farms Chinese coolie labor was used in potato raising. They had separate living quarters, generally far removed from the homesite.

Perhaps because of this contact there are still two Chinese cemeteries in northern San Mateo County. One was on the Brooks Ranch and one on the Gardiner Place.

The cattle raising proved very profitable when carried on on a large scale, especially the dairying, and particularly butter making.

Husing's General Store was one of the first buildings. Many kinds of merchandise could be obtained there. It occupied the present site of the Anchor Drug Store. The building, after passing through several hands, became a saloon called White House Gardens. Later it was occupied by James Casey and was known as the White House.

In the meantime Joe Hill's Store had been started on the Main Street, to be taken over by the Belli's.

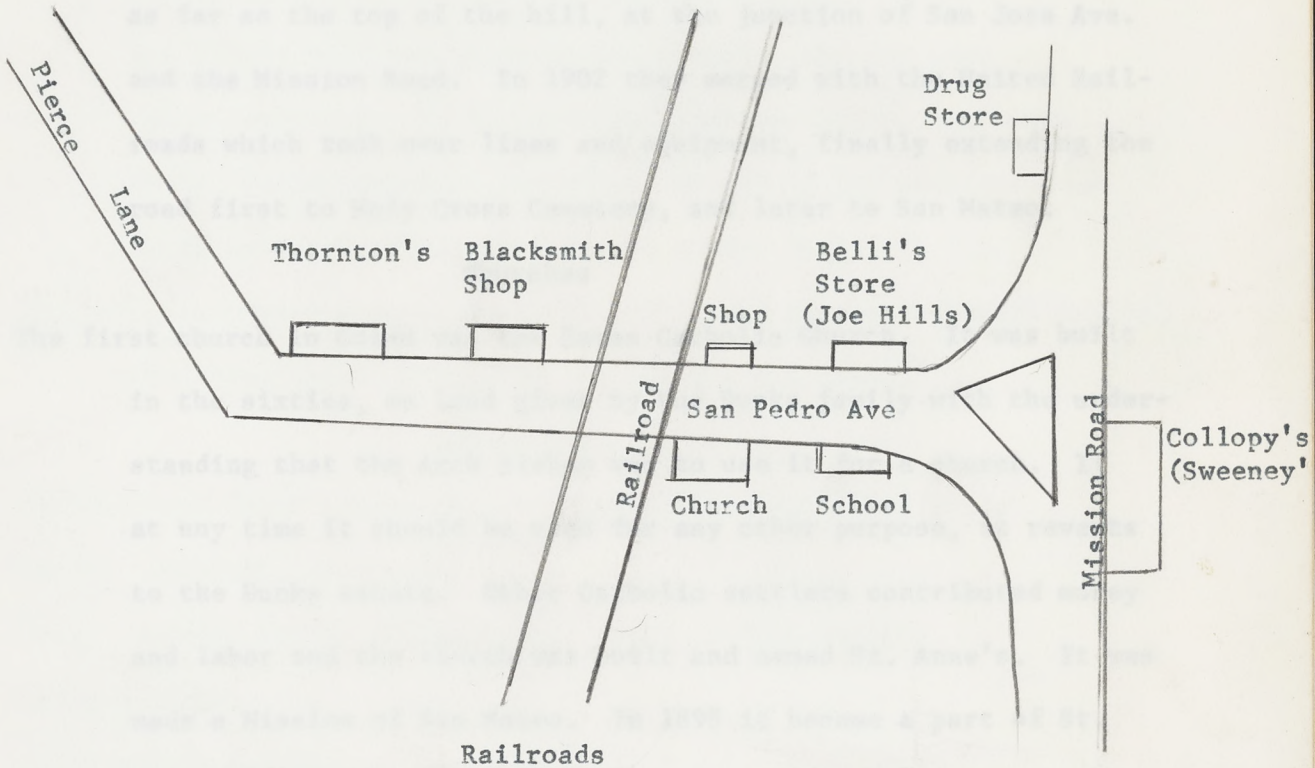
Where the Bank now stands was the location of the first butcher shop owned by Ned Daly.

The Collopy property was originally owned by and known as "Sweeney's". It was a ramshackle saloon, and was purchased by Michael Fay Sr. He in turn sold it to George Collopy (his son-in-law) in the early eighties, and his heirs are its present owners. Mr. Collopy built a hall known as Collopy's Hall, which was used for dances, entertainments, etc.

Later, in the other end of town another Hall was built by the Grangers which had been organized by some farmers. It was on Dunks St. the building was named The Jefferson Hall and was later used as a school. Patrick Brooks, R. S. Thornton, Frank Pierce, Patrick Flannelly, James Casey, Sr. and Judge Crow were some of the members of this organization.

Where Belli's Store now stands, in the early sixties Joe Hill built the first store, a general merchandise store. He was Tax Collector and Assesor (sic) for the Township, and the Post Office was also in the store. He married the daughter of Michael Comerford, who was a farmer on the coast near Mussel Rock. The Comerfords were very early settlers. He sold the store to Pasalaque in the late seventies. Mr. P. sold the store to M. Belli and Co. the present owners, in 1887.

Map



Railroads

Southern Pacific: A railroad known as the San Francisco - San Jose ran as far as Mayfield Oct. 17, 1863. In 1864 it went as far as San Jose. On August 1st, 1866 the Time Table shows the Colma station as School House Station. On April 13, 1871, it was still School House Station and was a flag stop. On May 1, 1874 it was listed as a regular stop known as Colma. The change was made some time between; no special record and no reason known. The time-table of 1866 was written in ink,not printed.

(My father, who was not a native of Colma, said it was named Colma because one day when the train was passing through, a small boy traveling with his mother, looked up and said "Gee, it's Col'ma")

Joost Railway: First electric road started in 1893. It first ran from downtown S.F. to 30th Street. Later it was lengthened and ran as far as the top of the hill, at the junction of San Jose Ave. and the Mission Road. In 1902 they merged with the United Railroads which took over lines and equipment, finally extending the road first to Holy Cross Cemetery, and later to San Mateo.

Churches

The first church in Colma was the Roman Catholic Church. It was built in the sixties, on land given by the Dunks family with the understanding that the Arch Bishop was to use it for a church. If at any time it should be used for any other purpose, it reverts to the Dunks estate. Other Catholic settlers contributed money and labor and the church was built and named St. Anne's. It was made a Mission of San Mateo. In 1898 it became a part of St. Michael's Parish and in 1914 became a parish of its own, under Father Clifford. He allowed the name to be changed to Holy Angels, which it still is. Parts of the original structure are still in use.

It was not till the early 1900's that a Protestant Chapel was built. They had had a Sunday School for some time prior to this. Much

credit must go to Mrs. Henry Ward Brown who worked diligently on the project.

Land Facts

Some of the land which was generally known as Colma was divided into several tracts. One piece, between the main village of Colma and Daly's Hill was known as the Commons, and was used as common property. No title to the land was known, many lots being 'delinquent tax' property. It was in two sections, one known as Castle Tract, and one as Garden Valley.

Much of this land was later obtained by several pioneers through paying these delinquent taxes and receiving a tax title.

Random Notes

Quarrel over land: Adjoining land being homesteaded; no title

House: One room, five miles

Fuel: Sawyer, Spring Valley Lakes. Fall. 4 foot lengths.

Casey episode.

Uncle John's wedding.

Moving the house.

Banking. Paying off

Social Life:

Parites (sic)

Cock fighting.

(Some of these I can amplify)

Earliest settlers in Hills:

Patrick Brooks, James Casey Sr., Michael Fay, Mansueto Belli, Michael Comerford, John Castle, Mr. Emerson, Mr. McKenna, Dennis Murphy, Patrick Flannelly.

Now Daly City #1: Slightly later - John Daly Sr. Faly's dairy Michael O'Reilly, Billy Patterson, Mr. Woods, Ben Greene Sr., Owen McMahon, Mr. Fawley, Billy Petterson, Mr. Naughton, Mr. Meaherin, John Deeney, Patrick Deeney, Mr. Feeney, Mat Maloney Sr., Mr. Mullen, R. Tobin Sr., Kirkpatrick, Michael Millet, John Carrol, Michael Morrisey, Walter Rahey, Ed. McSweeney, Robert Patten, Mr. Regan, Mr. Keighery.

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